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Eagle Motorsports travels to Mexico to compete in Baja 1000

NOVEMBER 2, 2015



An 840-mile drive down the coast of the Baja California peninsula in Mexico might sound like a great way to enjoy some sightseeing, but for 13 Georgia Southern students, that drive will be dangerous, grueling and the opportunity of a lifetime.

The students are part of the University's Eagle Motorsports Baja 1000 team, and are traveling to Mexico to compete in the second-largest off-road race in the world: the Baja 1000. While there, the student-based team will make history by becoming the first collegiate team to compete in the utility terrain vehicle-specific class, and the first collegiate team to compete in the race in more than three decades.

"It's not a sustainable activity for us to go out and baby step into the field," said Spencer Harp, team advisor and laboratory supervisor for the Department of Mechanical Engineering. "You get noticed for the splash that you make, so we're just jumping in and doing something else that no one else has done."

The team, one of three racing teams within Eagle Motorsports, was challenged with rebuilding a brand new utility terrain vehicle (UTV), a two-seat machine with a roll cage, from the ground up to meet SCORE-International requirements. SCORE-International is the governing organization of the off-road race.

In addition, the team worked with Hisun Motors to secure a corporate sponsorship, plus numerous other sponsors, to help with the cost of materials and travels to Mexico. They also had to prepare mentally and physically for the 840-mile course, which must be completed within 40 hours of crossing the start line.

"You're not just riding down a dirt road, this is just a rough cut path through the middle of the woods," Harp said. "Some of these paths haven't been touched by man, period. You can go from riding down a smooth beach or smooth dirt road to going through mountainous rocky, terrain, crossing old riverbeds full of silt and sand. It's an endurance race."

Kara Dees, co-captain of the team and one of two female students traveling to Mexico, and Robert Branch, project lead, are two of the students that'll be driving and co-driving the car. Both students said they have taken up various forms of exercise to prepare, but also are relying heavily on their faith and support system made up of friends and family, to prepare mentally for the challenge.

"The biggest thing is: to finish first, first you must finish. You have to beat the terrain first," Branch said. "The co-driver has a duty and obligation of not only being your ears and eyes because you also have to watch out who's behind you, but they are also normally your mechanic. Most of the time for professional and amateur racers, the co-drivers are the first person to step out of the car. If the driver is hurt or any changes need to be made communicatively, it is the co-driver's responsibility."

In addition to the driver and co-driver, there is a chase team that follows the course to support if anything goes wrong. For Eagle Motorsports, an additional support team on the East Coast will watch a live broadcast of the race and track the car with GPS to communicate with the chase team in Mexico.

"There are some areas of the course that are in a valley where our radio communications won't work, our satellite phones won't work and at times, you might be 100 miles from anyone who can help you. So there is a fear factor associated with it," said Harp.

The team also faces another challenge—criticism from veteran racers, some who invest millions of dollars to participate in this race.

"Most teams spend a minimum of two years building a platform to go race, and we started a year ago with the idea, and spent six months trying to secure a corporate sponsorship, then building, designing and figuring out the logistics," Harp said. "That's a third of the time anyone else would

normally attempt to do it. We've been told by several seasoned professionals that this was an absurd idea and we're really reaching.

"But what they don't understand is where they may have a team of two or three people, we've got 20-plus, well-educated engineering students making an effort to ensure everything is accounted for," he continued.

Branch added, "We've had plenty of people ask 'Why not start with something smaller?' But a lot of people start to realize that time is a factor in everything they do. If someone came to you and handed you a once in a lifetime experience, and you knew that you'd have to work every single day to even come close to success, would you still take it? That's what I was left with and I chose yes."

And while Harp admits the team might be "in the dark a bit," having accomplished so much in so little time is what is driving the team's motivation.

"Being able to see our hard work come to fruition is the sweetest reward. This year long project has had many ups and downs along the way," Dees said. "I am excited to make history by showing up as the first collegiate team to ever race in this [class of] competition."

The Baja 1000 team departs for Mexico Nov. 9, and the race begins Nov. 20. Television coverage is available on CBS Sports Network and ESPN, and a live stream of the race will be available at www.score-international.com.

Georgia Southern Hosts 10th Annual International Festival

NOVEMBER 2, 2015



The Georgia Southern University Office of International Programs & Services will host the 10th Annual International Festival on Saturday, Nov. 14 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Mill Creek Regional Park.

During the festival, students from elementary, middle and high schools in the area can show off their work in the Global Village – a series of booths inspired by different countries. Georgia Southern Global Ambassadors help to make the booths educational and interesting for everyone. Germany, Ghana, Japan, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Trinidad & Tobago and Vietnam will be the countries that will be represented in the village.

Visitors can also enjoy World Stage performances throughout the day. Marcel Portilla Band, Bollywood & Classical Fusion Dance presented by the South Asian Student Organization (SASO), Grupo Folklórico Uruguayo Cimmarrón, Conjunto Orgullo Panameño and Confucius Institute Dance Troupe will perform dances and music from their cultures. Performances will begin at 10:30 a.m. and end at 3:30 p.m.

An International Food Court will offer a variety of dishes from around the globe. Guests can purchase foods from Argentina, Greece, India, Jamaica, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Thailand and Mexico. The World Craft Bazaar will feature unique items for purchase from Haiti, Ghana, China, Taiwan, Kenya, Korea, Trinidad and the Philippines.

Everyone can participate in the “It’s a Small World” international arts and craft area as well. This is a free area where children can learn to make Chinese drums, Ancient Egyptian necklaces, Spanish fans, Thailand lotuses, Mexican Dia de los Muertos, Brazilian carnival masks and crowns. Children can also participate in face painting and henna hand prints.

The festival is the result of collaboration with the Bulloch County Board of Education, the Bulloch County Parks and Recreation Department, the Statesboro Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Statesboro-Bulloch County Chamber of Commerce. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, visit www.georgiasouthern.edu/intfest.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers more than 125-degree programs serving more than 20,500 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered and hands-on approach to education.